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McCleary, James
Thompson

“The meaning of
memorials”: an address...

[Philadelphia]

[1912]

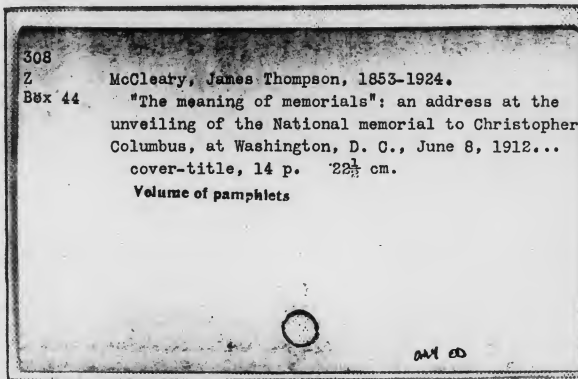
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"The Meaning of Memorials"

AN ADDRESS BY
James Thompson McCleary
AT THE
UNVEILING
OF THE
NATIONAL MEMORIAL
TO
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
At Washington, D. C.
June 8, 1912

Sent Out with the Compliments of George H. Paine, Philadelphia, Pa.

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THE CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS MEMORIAL
COMMISSION

(Appointed by Act of Congress)

HON. PHILANDER C. KNOX
Secretary of State

HON. HENRY L. STIMSON
Secretary of War

HON GEORGE PEABODY WETMORE
U. S. Senator from Rhode Island

HON JAMES T. McCLEARY
Former Representative in Congress from Minnesota

MR. JAMES A. FLAHERTY
*Supreme Knight
Knights of Columbus*

Commissioner on Arrangements for Dedication

MR. EDWARD L. HEARN
*Former Supreme Knight
Knights of Columbus*

Executive and Disbursing Officer
COL. SPENCER COSBY, U. S. A.

Secretary
MR. WALTER R. PEDIGO

The Sculptor
MR. LORADO TAFT, Chicago

ORDER OF EXERCISES

Hon. PHILANDER C. KNOX, *Secretary of State*
Presiding

Invocation Rt. Rev. Monsignor THOMAS J. SHAHAN
Address Judge VICTOR J. DOWLING
Music U. S. MARINE BAND
Address Hon. JAMES T. McCLEARY
Unveiling of the Memorial .. THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR
Salute BATTERY E, 3d U. S. FIELD ARTILLERY
Star Spangled Banner U. S. MARINE BAND
Presentation of Wreaths SOCIETIES
Address The PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES
Benediction Bishop WILBUR P. THIRKIELD
Parade Brig. Gen. ROBERT K. EVANS, Grand Marshal

THE MEANING OF MEMORIALS.

The framers of this program evidently believe in proverbs. In selecting the speakers and arranging the order of the three formal addresses, they have illustrated three of these proverbs. "What is well begun is half done," so for the opening address they were fortunate in securing the eminent jurist from New York to whose address we have listened with so much pleasure and profit. "All's well that ends well," and the occasion is honored by having the closing address made by the foremost citizen of the republic. With such an opening and such a closing of the formal speaking program, with its success thus assured, it was not necessary for the committee to look far for the one to deliver the middle address. They need only act on the theory, "The ends justify the means."

With the vision of a poet and the skill of an artist, Justice Dowling has pictured for us the career of Christopher Columbus. To that picture it were idle for me to try to add. On the other hand, I am not unmindful of the fact that this occasion has certain aspects, some of them international in character, which can most appropriately be presented by the Chief Magistrate of the Nation. My field, therefore, as the representative of the Christopher Columbus Memorial Commission, seems in the nature of the case circumscribed to the memorial itself and some of the things that it suggests.

What the Indians Saw.

What one sees depends largely on what he is.

Our first transcontinental railway was completed in 1869. Westward from Omaha and eastward from the Golden Gate the work of construction had for years been pushed. Across the plains and over the mountain passes strong men had long been building the two sections of the road toward each other. Nearer and nearer month by month they came. Finally not far from

Ogden the two sections were united, and to mark the wedding of the East and the West a golden spike was driven.

From all parts of the country prominent men journeyed out to the Sierras to witness the crowning act of the epoch-making achievement. Among those assembled on the day appointed for the ceremony were groups of aborigines. These Indians saw the wondrous locomotives which always impress us with awe. They looked on those mighty engines, but marvelled not at their mechanism or their power. On the moving palaces that we call railway coaches they gazed with stolid faces. They saw the wires stretching from pole to pole away off into the distance, and they were told that over those lines men hundreds of miles apart could talk as if face to face. Even this wonderful thing evoked from them no sign of surprise.

But there was one performance that seemed to fascinate them, one that called forth from them great grunts of admiration. *On it they gazed with eyes and ears and mouths—every avenue of approach to the brain—wide open with appreciation and approval. As they watched it they became tremulous with excitement; every fibre of their bodies seemed to vibrate with enthusiastic admiration. And what was it that called forth such marked evidences of appreciation? It was the way in which the linemen climbed the telegraph poles to fix the wires!*

Why did this comparatively unimportant performance command their admiration while the really great things to be seen were unable even to secure their attention? It was because the climbing of the telegraph poles came within the range of their experience and thus came within their power to appreciate. They knew the difficulty of tree-climbing even with the aid of the bark and the branches. Here were bare trees, barkless and branchless, and yet these wonderful white men climbed them with surprising quickness and certainty.

The powerful locomotives, the beautiful coaches, the wonderful electric telegraph—none of these made any impression on the natives. Why? They failed to admire simply because they could not understand. Under such conditions men al-

ways and everywhere are prone to do one of two things, either to remain wholly unmoved or else to be so completely overwhelmed that they regard the phenomena as supernatural.

A Credit to the Nation.

Only those who have themselves achieved can intelligently appreciate achievement. Only she who has patiently day after day run her fingers back and forth over the keyboard can really understand and adequately admire the technique of the pianist. Only those who have participated in the construction of some great work can appreciate constructive achievement at its true worth. Intelligent appreciation of greatness in others argues a measure of greatness in oneself. Monuments to great men are honorable alike to those for whom they are set up and to those who erect them. It is to our own credit as a nation, therefore, that, even though tardily, we have erected out of public funds and are now dedicating with dignified ceremonial this fine memorial to the world's foremost discoverer, perhaps its greatest secular benefactor.

It is a principal of human nature that what men habitually contemplate they come to resemble. That is the lesson of Hawthorne's story of The Great Stone Face. And everyday observation and experience confirm its truth. Those whose minds habitually dwell on mean and petty things tend to become mean and petty. Those who think often on large and noble things grow day by day in breadth of mind and magnanimity of soul. "As a man thinketh, so is he." And so I tender my hearty congratulations to that great society so numerous represented here today on having named their organization after him in whose honor we are now assembled. The very name, Knights of Columbus, is elevating and ennobling. Knights! Columbus! What pictures of chivalry the words conjure up! What courage in the presence of danger! What persistence in the face of discouragement! What kindness to the weak! What generosity

to the poor! What sympathy for the suffering! What faith! What constancy! How could a man fail to be bettered by membership in an organization "so conceived and so dedicated?"

It was Italy that gave Columbus to the world. So it seems fitting that this memorial should be unveiled by the distinguished gentleman who as Ambassador so worthily represents that great country at this capital. When in a few minutes now the Ambassador shall have performed that pleasant duty, it will be found that the memorial is to Christopher Columbus alone. Not a man who accompanied him on his memorable voyage is here remembered. Even Ferdinand and Isabella are honored only by a medallion on the back of the memorial. Is this a just arrangement? To the American people it is more important than may at first appear that the popular answer to this question be right.

The men shared with Columbus the dangers of the deep; should they not here and now be honored with him for the achievement? In a certain sense, yes. But who knows their names? The human mind has limitations. The ability to remember some things depends on the power to forget many things. Only the loftiest mountains can be seen at great distances; the supporting hills at their base soon disappear from view.

Columbus the Chief Figure.

Ferdinand and Isabella rendered their own country many and great services, and for those services they are justly honored in the annals of Spain. But the world at large remembers them chiefly as the patrons of Columbus in his fateful enterprise. Their world-fame is due primarily to his achievement. Their relation to that achievement was such that it seems eminently fitting that their names and faces should appear on this memorial.

And here it seems proper to note that whenever and wherever a great deed for humanity is done, it will usually be found that connected with it in some inspiring and helpful way is a good woman.

Considering now the particular achievement that we are assembled to commemorate, whose brain conceived the enterprise? Whose skill wrought out the details? Whose soul furnished the courage that surmounted all difficulties? Who pushed on when every one else wished to turn back? Who was the one person for whom there could be no substitute? Who was the one person indispensable to the success of the enterprise? As a matter of inherent justice and the highest equity, whose should be the supreme credit for the result? The world rightfully ascribes to Columbus the chief glory. This memorial is evidence that we concur in the world's opinion. That judgment will never be reversed or recalled.

It would be out of place on this occasion to discuss questions of a partisan character. We have come as one people to pay honor to Christopher Columbus. Our hearts are beating in unison with gratitude to our benefactor. The memorial is a tribute to all our people—all sections, all parties, all creeds—to a man who has rendered a service of incalculable value to the entire world. But the very setting up of the memorial to this heroic soul contains a suggestion too vital to the welfare of all our people to be allowed to pass unnoticed here.

More New Worlds Being Discovered.

In essence, though not in form, the achievement of Christopher Columbus is constantly being duplicated. New worlds are constantly being discovered.

Within the lifetime of many in this audience clothing was all hand-made. At that time the making of garments was one of the incidents of housekeeping. Few people were able to find in garment-making a distinct means of earning a livelihood. Since the invention of the sewing-machine the making of clothing has become a great industry, one in which hundreds of thousands of our people find opportunity to earn an honest and useful livelihood. More than that. For every person who a century ago was able to get one new dress or one new suit of clothes a year, a hundred can now afford two or more new suits or dresses every

year. By inventing the sewing-machine Elias Howe opened up a new world to industry, vastly increased opportunity, and placed within the reach of untold millions of people comforts that but for his invention would have remained wholly unattainable.

One of the honored residents of this capital city, Alexander Graham Bell, who still moves modestly among us, has opened up another world which but for his invention would have remained closed to mankind. The communication of intelligence is the world's greatest civilizer. And the telephone has made possible a vast number of useful services that without it would be impossible. It has added immensely to the comfort and convenience and safety of the world's teeming millions. And for every person formerly employed in transmitting messages, hundreds are now so employed. To the wage-earner the telephone has opened up a new world of opportunity for service and reward.

The men on the caravel with Columbus several times threatened to throw him overboard. If they had done so, would they have promoted or retarded the world's progress? Would they have helped or hurt the great mass of mankind? Suppose that the people of those days in all countries had definitely decided that they would use the power of their governments to prevent men of the type of Columbus from exercising their talents, would they have been wise or unwise? Would it be to the advantage of the mass of our people for our government to adopt the policy of preventing men from doing the best and the most of which they are capable?

There are many new worlds yet to be discovered. Wonderful as was the nineteenth century, its achievements can be far eclipsed in the twentieth. The men could have thrown Columbus overboard. Progress can be hindered. Shall this great nation, the flowering century-plant of time, promote or retard the opening up of these new worlds waiting to be discovered? Do we really desire progress, or do we simply wish to talk about it?

A Square Deal for All.

For a long time ancient Sparta pursued the policy of exposing all puny infants on the hillsides to die. Only those infants could lawfully be nourished that gave promise of growing up into vigorous manhood or womanhood. Under that system Sparta developed a great race and was able to maintain itself in the midst of powerful foes. Since then the world has grown kinder and the Spartan policy of deliberately killing off the weak has been abandoned. *But would it not be unspeakably foolish to adopt the opposite policy of deliberately killing off the strong? And who would be the chief sufferers under such a policy? Precisely those whose interest it is professed to serve thereby. The weak need the strong vastly more than the strong need the weak.*

Among men there are more hearts that are warm than heads that are wise. Men differ not so much in their motives as in their methods. Though pain and poverty seem to have been ordained by One infinitely wiser and kinder than we, all of us would like to banish them from the earth. Not every one knows how to do it, but every one ought to know how not to do it. The lowly cannot be permanently lifted up by pulling down the exalted. The real interest of the many cannot be promoted by unjust treatment of the few.

The Value of Leadership.

We have met to honor achievement. We pay tribute today to the Genoese boy who rose from the deepest obscurity to worldwide, age-enduring fame. He heard the voices of the sea and followed the beckoning waves of the blue Mediterranean. Step by step he solved old ocean's mystery and conquered all its terrors. His achievement enlarged the world for man and gave new glory to the sovereigns who lent him aid. Had he received as his reward one ten-thousandth part of what he gave to mankind he would have been rich beyond the dream of avarice. He would have become rich not by taking from others, but by preserving to himself a little of what he created. And it is still a

part of the divine law of compensation that in order to do much legitimately for oneself one must do immensely more for others. Exceptions to this rule only go to prove it. If wrong-doing never prospered, no one would ever be tempted to do wrong; if it always prospered, the most virtuous would be sorely tried.

Slowly but surely man is moving upward. Disease and pestilence are being driven from the earth. Before the rising sun of intelligence, ignorance and superstition are vanishing like the mists of the morning. Pain is being mitigated and poverty is being lessened. The average man today enjoys comforts and conveniences that a king could not command even a century ago. Perhaps the chief significance of this memorial is its value as evidence that the American people recognize the fact that in the onward and upward march of humanity the many have always been led by the few, and that in the nature of the case this must always be true. This is the meaning of memorials.

Let us here and now as a nation highly resolve that, in the future as in the past, America shall continue to be the land of opportunity. Let us make it more true rather than less true that in this country the man of one talent and the man of many talents shall each be free to achieve the most and the best of which he is capable, and that each shall have the full reward that he fairly earns. Let us keep wide open for every one the golden gate of opportunity.

The Importance of Institutions.

Another truth this memorial speaks with voiceless eloquence. This Columbus whom we honor has passed from earth. Men, however great, must die. The good work they started would perish with them but for one thing. To insure the carrying on of their work after they have passed away, men establish institutions. Before the fateful day on Calvary the Incarnation of Love and Wisdom gathered around Him a body of men to carry on His work. The institution then established has survived the centuries. It still remains, blessing and to bless mankind.

One April day in 1865 our country was shocked to hear that the head of the nation, its best beloved son, had been slain by an assassin. Indignation and anger were felt by every heart. In New York City the editor of a certain newspaper had been saying harsh things about the loved and lost. A crowd gathered and moved toward the building in which this paper was published. The crowd's righteous resentment was to be shown by the demolition of the offending plant. No one can tell what might have happened. But a man appeared on a balcony above the crowd and in a voice that was heard by all, he cried: "God reigns, and the Government at Washington still lives." That speech was an inspiration, worthy of the man who a few years later reached the same high station and suffered the same sad fate. Garfield saw that day with the vision of a seer and spoke with the wisdom of a sage. The effect was instantaneous. His words fell like oil upon the troubled waters. The crowd, which was moved by a righteous indignation but was about to express it in a wrong way, gradually dissolved and the nation was saved another terrible crime.

Garfield was right. Men die, but institutions live. The men who framed our government have all gone to their reward. But they gave us an institution and a constitution which for a century and a quarter has served us marvelously well. Our national constitution has commanded the enthusiastic commendation of the greatest and wisest statesmen of this and other lands. In the words of Gladstone, "The American constitution is the greatest instrument ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man." It served well our national needs when we were a little country of thirteen states and four millions of people scattered along the Atlantic seaboard. It has served us well as we have grown to be the mightiest nation on the face of the earth, with a hundred millions of people, a nation that has extended across the continent and covered the islands of the eastern seas. Through all these years it has remained largely unaltered—almost entirely unchanged in its vital principles. That it has been amended shows that it can be amended when the people in their sober judgment think that that is wise.

Real Progress Difficult.

To the inexperienced all things are possible and most things are easy. Experience teaches a different lesson. It shows that there is often a vast difference between promises and performances. Some of the most highly praised mining claims fail to pan out. Whatever in the present agitation is true and wise will remain, the rest will be blown away like chaff in the severe winnowing of public discussion.

I have an abiding faith in the might of right and in the common sense of the common people. We are not always wise in the method of carrying out our best impulses, but experience proves that the sober second sense of American people can safely be trusted. One of the purposes of our constitution is to hold things steady until that sober second sense has had time to make itself felt.

And now, Mr. President, to you as the Chief Magistrate of the Nation, I have the honor, on behalf of the Christopher Columbus Memorial Commission, to turn over this impressive memorial. We chose as its site this entrance to the nation's capital, this gateway to the district that bears his name. May the nation preserve the memorial with loving care, and may it throughout unnumbered years speak to our people its lessons of sublime faith and unflinching courage.

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